

## **Corps Releases 2004-2005 Missouri River Flow Plan**

Omaha - The Army Corps of Engineers released today the final 2004-2005 Annual Operating Plan for the Missouri River. With drought still being felt throughout the basin, water conservation is emphasized in the plan.

The plan calls for only minimum flows from Gavins Point Dam to support downstream uses. The commercial navigation season will open on April 1 at the mouth near St. Louis, but its length could be shortened 27 to 61 days, depending on the amount of runoff this winter and spring. A final determination on the season length will be made on July 1, 2005 based on the actual amount of water stored in the reservoirs.

The ability to provide steady to rising reservoir levels during the spring fish spawn is very dependent on the volume, timing and distribution of runoff. With normal to above normal runoff early next year, there will be rising levels in Oahe, Garrison and Fort Peck reservoirs. If drought conditions persist, to the extent possible, the Corps will try to provide rising levels in Oahe during April and May and in Fort Peck during May and June.

"The Corps initiated a strategy in 2004 to rotate emphasis among the three upper reservoirs on a yearly basis during the fish spawn," said Brig. Gen. William Grisoli, Northwestern Division Engineer. "We intend to continue to use this strategy during drought in an attempt to maximize the benefit to fish species in the reservoirs."

The final plan was changed from the draft published in September for setting releases from Gavins Point Dam to benefit the nesting of least terns and piping plovers. Release rates this spring will be held steady until the majority of the birds have nested, usually by late May or early June. Then they will be adjusted to meet downstream target flows. The purpose is to continue to meet project purposes, minimize the loss of nesting birds, and conserve additional water in the upper three reservoirs.

There will not be a "spring rise" from Gavins Point in 2005. However, to comply with the 2003 Amended Biological Opinion issued by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a plan for a rise in 2006 is being developed. There will not be a test rise from Fort Peck Dam because of the low reservoir level.

The 2004-2005 Annual Operating Plan is available on the Northwestern Division web site at: [www.nwd.usace.army.mil](http://www.nwd.usace.army.mil).